AFL Prevention Programs: Lessons Learned

Barriers, Challenges, and Solutions

Attrition and retention of high-risk populations

- It is difficult to implement a strong program when students do not attend the groups. Retention is a big issue for implementation and needs to be planned for. Some projects try offering incentives, food, drawings, gift cards, and door prizes.

Recruitment and parental consent can be out of your control and challenging

- When schools have fewer youth enroll, there are fewer youth available for recruitment into the program. Persistence is important to regain footing but not always successful.
- Recruitment should be properly planned for as it can take a great deal of resources. Ensuring that all appropriate staff are working on recruitment is important- it is not one person's job.
- Projects must work with partner sites/schools to ensure parental consents are returned. Without their support, it is very difficult to get consent forms returned. Provide incentives to the district, the school, and the teachers- work on all levels.
- Determine if teachers can offer additional assistance in having consents returned. For example some teachers offer "extra credit" for returning consent forms.
- Some projects use face-to-face contacts, mailings, home visits, and recruitment tables at local sites.

Data collection and evaluation processes can be challenging for programs

- Allow for enough time for data collection. Some areas may require that you collect data over multiple days to allow for absent youth.
- Instruments need to be culturally appropriate and at an appropriate literacy level for the target population.

Staffing turnover creates setbacks

- Staff and site turnover can negatively affect the program, evaluation, and implementation. Stability and consistency is very important.
- Projects need to maintain high quality staff with enough resources over the long term to keep the program moving forward and keep communication open.
- Programs need to gauge the needs of their staff and watch out for burnout. As possible, salaries and benefits should be increased to be in line with other community agencies. Offering trainings is also important for professional development.

Intervention timing and activities offered are important to success

- Programs should start recruitment for services around the site's calendar schedule. Often times this means beginning at the start of the school year.
- Transportation is an issue. After school programs often have to address transportation and may need to provide rides to the youth.
- Some youth struggle with literacy and behavior challenges. Activities should be planned around the developmental and physical needs of a group- sometimes this

requires physical activities to be incorporated into programming or the time of the program to be changed. Language barriers can also be an issue to overcome.

- Language barriers can be an issue to address up front for youth and parents.

Lack of a strong evaluation design can negatively impact results

- Comparison groups are important to being able to truly demonstrate any results. It is critical to ensure that proper recruitment for this group is planned with outside partners ahead of time. Find out what the comparison truly wants in return for their services.
- Appropriate funds need to be set aside for the evaluation. Appropriate staff should be in place for the evaluation as well- including a research assistant.

Parental involvement takes work

- In many communities, programs must implement a multi-prong design to reach and serve parents. Projects should be consistent with their outreach efforts. In order for this to be effective, projects need to have resources set aside to specifically address parent outreach.
- It is important to continually try to reach out to parents through various efforts. Youth themselves can be used to reach their parents (homework assignments). Packets of information sent home to parents has also been seen as useful. Projects can also use the schools to help with parent networking.
- Parents may agree to participate in a program but do not always follow through with participation. In order to obtain enough parents in a program at least double that amount should be recruited.

Outside factors that teens face influence the program

- Many youth reside in fragile family environments. Programs need to consider the family's basic needs before moving on to the program concepts. This may require offering additional services or referrals for families.
- Media is a big influence in our lives. Media can sometimes send negative messaging. Programs should develop strategies to directly address the media and create a more supportive environment.